

Message Text

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42

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01

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R 171253Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7773

INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 12092

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, IN

SUBJ: PRECENSORSHIP IMPOSED ON INDIAN EXPRESS

1. PRECENSORSHIP WAS IMPOSED BY THE GOI CENSOR ON ALL INDIAN EDITIONS OF THE INDIAN EXPRESS, EFFECTIVE AUGUST 17. THE AUGUST 17 NEW DELHI EDITION CAME OUT LATE THIS MORNING IN AN EDITION OF ABOUT 10,000 (LESS THAN HALF ITS USUAL DELHI CIRCULATION). REASON FOR IMPOSITION OF PRECENSORSHIP WAS GIVEN AS PUBLICATION IN THE AUGUST 16 EDITION OF A "LETTER TO THE EDITOR" BY OLD FREEDOM FIGHTER AND FORMER CONGRESS LEADER, J.B. KRIPALANI, CRITICIZING PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS. SAME EDITION ALSO CARRIED SEVERAL LETTERS CRITICAL OF CENSORSHIP IN GENERAL. EXPRESS SOURCE TELLS US THAT GOI CENSOR HAD PREVIOUSLY ISSUED ORDER PROHIBITING PUBLICATION OF ANY ARTICLES OR LETTER BY KRIPALANI SO EXPRESS WAS IN FORMAL DEFIANCE OF ORDER.

2. PRECENSORSHIP APPLIES TO EVERY WORD PUBLISHED IN NEWSPAPERS, INCLUDING ADVERTISEMENTS, AND INEVITABLY WILL MEAN THAT EXPRESS WILL BE ISSUED LATE EVERY DAY, WILL CONTINUE TO LOSE CIRCULATION, AND ALSO LOSE
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ADVERTISING REVENUE. WE ARE TOLD BY PRESS SOURCES THAT

GOENKA INTENDS TO FIGHT PRECENSORSHIP IMPOSITION IN COURTS, BUT HIS CHANCES ARE SLIM. GOENKA HAS REPOTEDLY ALSO FILED COUNTERSUITS AGAINST GOI FOR DEFAMATION OF CHARAHTER IN CONNECTION WITH GOI PRESS RELEASES SEVERAL WEEKS AGO WHICH DESCRIBED HIM AS "GUILTY" OF ALLEGED TAX VIOLATIONS BEFORE HE WAS TRIED.

3. PRESSURES ON THE EXPRESS PAPERS HAVE BEEN MOUNTING RAPIDLY IN THE LAST FEW WEEKS. EXPRESS HAS BEEN CUT OFF FROM ALL BANK CREDIT AND, WITH GOENKA'S OWN FINANCIAL POSITION UNDER INCREASING FIRE, PAPER HAS BEEN HAVING INCREASING DIFFICULTIES MEETING EXPENSES.

4. COMMENT: EXPRESS HAD CONTINUED IN RECENT MONTHS TO PERIODICALLY INSERT DISSENTING EDITORIALS AND ARTICLES AND TO PRINT NEWS STORIES WHICH ARE NOT FOUND ELSEWHERE (E.G., MEETING BETWEEN PRESIDENT AND J.P. NARAYAN LAST WEEK). GOI NOW SEEMS DETERMINED TO QUELL INDEPENDENT SPIRIT DISPLAYED BY THE EXPRESS AND TO FORCE GOENKA TO THE FINANCIAL WALL. WE SEE LITTLE CHANCE OF ANY EFFECTIVE RESISTANCE BY GOENKA AND THE EXPRESS, INDIA'S LARGEST ENGLISH-LANGUAGE NEWSPAPER CHAIN, TO THE NEW PRESSURES BEING APPLIED.
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